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INCREDVLVS ODI: HORACE AND THE SUBLITERARY AESTHETIC OF THE
AUGUSTAN STAGE

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As a series of *tableaux* I never saw anything equal to it. But to my mind it is execrable moral taste to have a storm and shipwreck with all its horrors on the stage. I could only scream and cover my eyes. It was revolting to hear the cheers and clapping of the audience. (*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. G. S. Haight, New Haven and London 1954, vol. II: 18)

non tamen intus

digna geri promes in scaenam, multaque tolles
ex oculis quae mox narret facundia praesens.
ne pueros coram populo Medea trucidet,
aut humana palam coquat exta nefarius Atreus,
aut in auem Procne uertatur, Cadmus in anguem.
quodcumque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi.

However, you are not to bring on to the stage events which ought to be carried out within; you are to remove many things from sight, and let them be related in due course by the eloquence of an eye-witness. Don't let Medea murder the children before the people's gaze, or wicked Atreus cook human offal in public or Procne be metamorphosed into a bird or

Cadmus into a snake. Anything you show me like that earns my
incredulity and disgust. (Hor. *Ars P.* 182–8; trans. Russell 1989)

Students of English literature know the exact cause of novelist George Eliot's indignation. It was the performance of Henry George Lewes and Charles Mathews' play *A Chain of Events*,¹ a melodrama fully in line with the genre's crave for sensational, spectacular effects to please the eye of an insatiable public cutting across socio-economic and cultural stratifications.² True to the spirit of the sub-category of 'nautical' melodramas,³ Act II of Lewes and Mathews' play culminated in the shipwreck whose realistic stage-representation George Eliot deploras. The authors' instructions read:

The Scene represents the open Sea in the midst of a Hurricane. A large dismantled Vessel tossed on the tempest is seen rolling heavily among the billows. Four or five only of the crew are left on the wreck, and are clinging to the spars and broken mast. At intervals between the roar of the ocean and the peals of thunder, broken sentences are caught from those on board ... A terrific peal of Thunder is heard – the lightning

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¹ Full title: *A Chain of Events, a Dramatic Story in Eight Acts*. As emerges from the date of her letter, George Eliot saw the play in the Lyceum on 16 April 1852. Her severe criticism can only imply she had no interest in Henry George Lewes, her partner to be, at that time. See further Beer (1977) 168–9.

² Among a vast literature on nineteenth-century melodrama, see primarily Booth (1965), (1981), (1991) 150–61; Meisel (1983); Brooks (1995); Hays and Nikolopoulou (1996); Moody (2000).

³ See e.g. Booth (1981); Meisel (1983) 189–200; Cox (1996).

runs along the sky, and the vessel goes down bodily, amidst a shriek from those on board. The waves wash over her, and nothing is seen but the open sea. In a few seconds two men are visible buffeting with the waves, and Gaspard crawls on to a small rock on the foreground.

We are not nearly as fortunate with respect to the second of the extracts quoted above, Horace's injunctions against the horrible and the miraculous as legitimate tragic spectacle: 'scenes of revolting violence (like Medea murdering her children) or sights which transgress the laws of nature (like Cadmus turning into a snake) should not be shown on the stage'.⁴ The gaps in our knowledge of both the scripted drama of the late Republican/early Augustan period and Horace's literary sources are such that we can neither tell which particular tragedies (if any at all) he may have had in mind nor pinpoint securely the dramaturgical trends (if any) he may have wished to deprecate in lines 182–8 of his *Letter to the Pisones (Ars poetica)*. We consequently take comfort in the thought that, like so much else in the epistle, lines 182–8 derive their special hue from Peripatetic literary criticism, with no point of contact with the realities of staged spectacle in first-century BCE Rome. In fact, the near-total absence of attestations of publicly staged performances of new tragedies in the early Augustan period,⁵ combined with Horace's use of Peripatetic and later Hellenistic doctrine as his 'theoretical grid'⁶ in the *Ars*, have been instrumental in deflecting readings of important sections of the epistle away from the contemporary Augustan literary scene

⁴ Rudd (1989) 179 ad loc.

⁵ See Manuwald (2011) 119; cf. Goldberg (1996) 272.

⁶ Citroni (2009) 22.

and towards the area of literary and aesthetic theory.⁷ ‘The literary scene ... is not the topic here ... it is the theory that he takes as his material’, wrote Russell in a milestone publication of the early 1970s.⁸ A rare example of scholarly understanding of the *Ars* as interacting programmatically with the actual Roman literary scene we find in Wiseman (1988). Focusing on the contentious passage of the *Ars* regarding the history and composition of satyr plays (220–50), Wiseman argues that satyr drama, whether in ‘pure’ or contaminated form, was a live genre in Augustan Rome, so much so that ‘we need not resist the natural assumption that Horace’s advice to young Piso was practical, and concerned with the writing of plays for real stage performance’.⁹ More recently, Bartsch reads the *Ars* as ‘the main backdrop’ against which Persius (especially in *Satires* 1 and 5) ‘chooses to carve out his own programmatic path’.¹⁰ Horace is taken to condemn the ‘literal staging’ of the consumption of human flesh, foreground ‘onstage cannibalism as an example of bad tragic *practices*’¹¹ and, in general, ‘offer guidance to composers of the high genres of epic and tragedy’ by means of ‘instructions for propriety in poetic composition’.¹² Lone voices aside, however, Horace’s ‘preoccupation with drama as a literary benchmark’ is read consistently as more of a debt to ‘scholarly convention and to the tastes of his

⁷ See primarily Brink (1963) 43–150; Russell (2006 [1973]); Innes (1989) 254–67; Rudd (1989) 19–37; Kilpatrick (1990); Reinhardt (2013); Laird (2014).

⁸ Russell (2006 [1973]) 331.

⁹ Wiseman (1988) 13. For an earlier, though still stimulating, reading of the *Ars* in the context of Augustan theatre see La Penna (1950).

¹⁰ Bartsch (2015) 17.

¹¹ Bartsch (2015) 29 (emphasis original).

¹² Bartsch (2015) 17.

addressee than to contemporary reality'.¹³ Rudd (1983) 84 is still an accurate reflection of prevailing scholarly opinion:

... the long section on drama was included partly for its intrinsic interest, partly because drama held a dominant position in the most important Greek criticism, viz. that of Aristotle and his successors ...

Yet, the undercurrent similarity between Horace's and Eliot's reaction to the privileging of 'showing' over 'telling' cannot be brushed aside. It brings sharply into focus the (for us) uncomfortable possibility that towards the lower end of the performance spectrum Victorian London and early imperial Rome shared stage-idioms speaking to the audience's pulse by mastering 'an aesthetic of astonishment'¹⁴ alongside an exhibitionist style of visual and moral excess. In nineteenth-century England no theatrical entertainment was more deeply embedded in Victorian culture and more sweepingly popular than melodrama, the genre which, systematically and, as it were, constitutionally, placed the highest premium on a pictorial over a narrative style of description and turned the transparent visibility of *pathos* and violence, terror and horror, into the backbone and overarching principle of its dramatic structure. In late first-century BCE Rome theatre-goers witnessed not only the performance of Varius' *Thyestes* (29 BCE), hailed by Quintilian as equal to the best Greek tragedies (*Inst.* 10.1.98), but also the rise of the most spectacular kind of stage entertainment with a dramatic plot that ever took shape in the ancient world, namely pantomime

¹³ Goldberg (2005) 181; cf. Harrison (2007) 4.

¹⁴ I borrow the term from Tom Gunning's classic piece (1989) on early cinema.

dancing.¹⁵ An expression-filled dance form predicated on the mute delineation of character and passion, pantomime enthralled by means of an affective vocabulary of steps and gestures: ‘speaking through the entrancing quiver of the palm’ (*Anth. Pal.* 9.505, 17), a silent, solo, usually male and masked dancer carried the full burden of theatrical communication by impersonating successively a series of mythological characters to the accompaniment of instrumental music and sung narrative in the form of a libretto (*fabula saltica*).

The case for ancient pantomime deserving a place in the line of ancestry of Western melodrama is beyond the scope of the present piece. Suffice to state that at the heart of both genres was an unashamedly corporeal dramaturgy which consciously downplayed the semiotics of articulate speech in favour of a ‘narrative aesthetics of embodiment’¹⁶ reliant on the physical, corporeal coding and externalisation of all passion; the voyeuristic lingering on human bodies caught in the grip of the most harrowing emotions, and the absolute centrality of gesture as an indicator of ‘inner’ life and nature. I will, however, pose the question that emanates directly from the broader cultural comparison thus far attempted. If the excesses of Victorian melodrama drew upon them many an intellectual’s critical eye, is it possible that, quite apart from being steeped in the Peripatetic critical tradition, Horace’s instructions too had a very real, urgent point of reference in his *contemporary* Rome?

¹⁵ For ancient sources see primarily Bonaria (1955–6) and Rotolo (1957). Among early discussions of the genre fundamental are still Weinreich (1948) and Wüst (1949). Recent contributions marking a resurgence of interest in pantomime dancing: Garelli (2004), (2006), (2007); Lada-Richards (2003a), (2003b), (2004), (2007), (2008); Hall and Wyles (2008); Webb (2008a), (2008b).

¹⁶ Brooks (1993) 21.

Could it be the case that the deeper, invisible source of Horace's indignation lay in the subliterate aesthetic of lowly, 'body genres',¹⁷ primarily (though not exclusively) the emergent, fashionable genre of pantomime dancing? How seriously have we considered the possibility that a pantomime-inflected theatrical aesthetics thriving on a blatant disregard of classical propriety had actually become a rage in the capital, a sweeping trend which, in the eyes of a detached or level-headed critic, had the potential to infect, if left unchecked, the purity of tragic composition?¹⁸ Could pantomime's gradual ascendancy to the top of Rome's show-business culture have anything to do with Horace's stipulations on what to exclude from tragedy's 'on-stage' space, the area within the audience's full field of vision where the corporeal, material dimension of all dramatic action unfolds?¹⁹

¹⁷ I borrow the term from Williams (1991), an influential piece on film theory.

¹⁸ Lack of evidence on the *staging* of newly composed tragedy in late Republican Rome should not obfuscate the fact that tragic *composition* is securely attested for this same period, not least by Horace himself, both in the *Ars*, addressed precisely at noblemen trying their hand at serious drama (see esp. *Ars P.* 382–4), and in his reference to the tragic Muse of Asinius Pollio (*Sat.* 1.10.42–3; *Carm.* 2.1.9–12). Although Horace sympathises with those electing to devote themselves to readers (*qui se lectori credere malunt*, *Epist.* 2.1.214), there is a multitude of others, he tells us, some even deserving praise (208–13), prepared to put up with a live audience's scorn (215). For the scattered testimonia on original tragic composition in late Republican Rome see Manuwald (2011) 278–80; cf. Fantham (2013) 152–8 (with a list of aristocrats dabbling in tragedy in the Republic and early principate, 155).

¹⁹ A similar in spirit, though larger in scale, poetic reaction to a contemporary craze is Persius, *Sat.* 1, where, as Freudenburg (2001) 158 notes, the satirist lashes out at 'the driving literary obsessions of his day', the 'crush of enthusiasm for all things Iliadic' (155). For Persius the problem lies in the all-sweeping 'Trojanification' of Rome, that is to say, it cuts deeper than

Pantomime is only conspicuous by its absence in scholarship on the *Ars poetica*, insofar as its increasing prominence in the theatrical scene of Horace's contemporary Rome is never recognised in a way that has a bearing on Horace's own literary output. To the best of my knowledge, Niall Rudd (1983) 84 remains the only voice to have ruffled the outermost edges of received wisdom by raising, in passing, the possibility that, as far as Horace's 'intentions' are concerned, 'we may believe that he was hoping to revive the old theatrical traditions in opposition to the increasingly popular mimes and pantomimes'. There is no reason why our acknowledgement of a subliterate strand as a powerful player in the field of first-century BCE cultural production should have an impact on our reading of the epistle in its entirety. Even so, I would still like to suggest (sections I–III) that, by positing pantomime's 'melodramatic' mode of exhibitionist excess as one of the 'missing links'²⁰ in the landscape against which Horace composed his letter, we could gain significant insights into the literary polemics informing the stubborn lines 182–8. I will conclude (section IV) by positioning the pantomime genre's and Horace's diametrically different aesthetic choices within the ever-shifting battleground between the values associated with visual and verbal codes of theatrical production in the post-classical world. Overall this article purports to argue that our fixation on the absence of contemporary Roman tragedy and the concomitant downplaying of contemporary points of reference in the *Ars* have blinded us to crucial nodes of intersection between the epistle and its cultural milieu – a partial view that has become impoverishing and

the named target, Attius Labeo (line 4) and his literal translations of Homeric verse. For Horace, the problem lies, I contend, in a contemporary fad for the sensational aesthetics of the subliterate stage.

²⁰ Expression borrowed from Fantham (1989).

detrimental. The *Ars* is, after all, fully embedded socially and culturally by means of its named addressees, the Pisones (*Ars P.* 6). Seeking to understand how it interacts with and participates in the poetic discourses of the late first century BCE should be just as urgent an aim as elucidating its links to Hellenistic literary criticism.

Furthermore, important pieces in the jigsaw that is the literature of the late first century BCE should be sought not only within the literary tradition itself but, most intriguingly, within the powerful aesthetic currents migrating from the domains of the subliterate into elite literary culture. Just as the aggressive ascendancy of melodrama in the West may be at the root of the way Romantic critics such as Coleridge and Lamb wrote about Shakespeare,²¹ pantomime's early success may have coloured (albeit to a different extent and in very different ways) a wide variety of Latin literary narratives. Being insufficiently 'marked' with the explicitness of open reference that would 'flip' them into 'prominence',²² the scar-marks such cultural exchanges left on the texts themselves are barely visible to us today. Moreover, as the subliterate has seldom been considered part of that 'matrix of possibilities'²³ preapproved by scholarly tradition as relevant to the reading of Augustan literature, classicists have naturally tended to not see it there, never having expected to encounter it in the first place.²⁴ It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that promiscuous interbreeding

²¹ See John (2001) 45–6.

²² Fowler (1997) 19.

²³ I use the notion of a 'matrix of possibilities' as understood by Fowler (1997), not only as the matrix created by pre-existing texts but as the broader cultural 'matrix into which any literary text is born and against which it must be read' (18).

²⁴ My argument here is inspired by Freudenburg (2001), who also goes back to Fowler (1997) to explain that, when we read a text with reference to what exists outside a notional

between the ‘high’ and the ‘low’ was very much a part of the broader cultural background informing the aesthetic judgement and firing the imagination of Augustan poets. Pantomime dancing in particular ought to be considered an irreducible element of that background – whether elite authors chose to keep it at arm’s length, defining themselves self-consciously against its principles and its genetic blueprint, or preferred to co-opt²⁵ its sizzling, flamboyant idioms in their own art, pantomime (and the subliterate in general) must be acknowledged at long last as a vitally central intertext with which Augustan writers interacted.

1. From tragedy to pantomime: the great shift in theatrical decorum

To suggest beyond reasonable doubt that pantomime was a cultural intertext potentially relevant to the *Ars*, the issue of chronology must be addressed first.

Although the theory of pantomime’s sudden, unheralded irruption into Roman life in the year 23 or 22 BCE has been discredited,²⁶ the ancient writers responsible for the

‘checklist’ of texts ‘preapproved as relevant’, we are likely to overlook important matter simply because we were not expecting to encounter it, ‘and so we don’t’. ‘Unless an allusion to something off the list is simply too powerful to be denied, it runs a decided risk of getting ignored or pushed aside as mere “background noise”’ (Freudenburg 2001, 35).

²⁵ Excellent examples are Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* are being fruitfully read with an eye on pantomime (see especially Galinsky 1975, 68; 1996, 265; and 1999, 204; Richlin 1992; Habinek 2002, 47, 52 and 53; Lada-Richards 2013; 2016; 2018), and Seneca, whose tragedies have recently been read as composed ‘with pantomime in mind’ (see Zanobi 2008; 2014; Zimmermann 2008; Slaney 2013).

²⁶ See primarily Jory (1981), (1995).

perpetuation of that particular narrative of origins²⁷ have captured a milestone moment in the genre's remarkably protracted period of evolution in both the East and West of the Mediterranean.²⁸ Understanding pantomime's development as a slow and gradual process, Lycinus, the fictitious defender of the genre in Lucian's *De saltatione*, highlights the period of Augustus as that of a decisive turn in the genre's quest for *kallos*, beauty (*Salt.* 34). It was then that Pylades from Cilicia and Bathyllus from Alexandria embarked on an extraordinary artistic venture, changing forever the nature of the dance experience in the capital as a result. Rather than constitute pantomime's birthday in absolute terms, the games for Marcellus given under the auspices of Augustus in 23 BCE must have marked the official 'launch' of pantomime as a self-contained, flamboyant genre with the potential for explosive mass appeal.

If the *Letter to the Pisones* was composed around 10 BCE,²⁹ Horace would have had ample time to witness pantomime's rise to the centre of the Augustan entertainment industry from 23/22 BCE. But even if it does belong to the early 20s, there is good reason to believe that pantomime would still have been very much a vibrant presence in the poet's world. Livy's famous digression into the origins of theatrical performances (*ludi scaenici*)³⁰ claims that the Etruscan *ludiones* summoned

²⁷ See Ath. 20d; Jer. *Chron.*, on the year 22 BCE (*PL* 27.553–4); Zos. 1.6.1; entries in the *Suda* under 'Athenodorus', 'pantomime dancing' and 'Pylades'.

²⁸ For a historical sketch see Garelli (2007) 147–208 and briefly Lada-Richards (2007) 19–28.

²⁹ According to Rudd (1989) 19 this is 'the most likely hypothesis', but the question of dating is unresolved. Among those supporting a late dating is Brink (1982) 557 (proposing *c.* 11–8 BCE).

³⁰ Livy's theatrical excursus may be ultimately derived from Varro's lost *De ludis scaenicis*, probably composed in the late fifties BCE.

to Rome in 365/364 BCE performed *sine carmine ullo, sine imitandorum carminum actu*, ‘without any song, without expressing the content of song through gestures’ (Liv. 7.2.4). Since, however, the notion of imitating a *carmen* is ‘a particularly apt description of the nature of the pantomime dance, in which the artist interprets in gesture and movement a literary text’,³¹ Livy’s double negative construction can be taken to betray his anxiety to drive a wedge between a decorous dancing of old and degenerate dance practices in fashion in his own day. If such a reading – which dovetails with Livy’s understanding of contemporary theatre as having reached a fever pitch of *insania* harmful to public morals³² – is correct, the implication could be that ‘pantomime dancing, or some form of imitative dance, was prevalent on the Roman stage well before 22 BC’.³³ In fact, we may be able to go further back. For even before the emergence of pantomime as a distinct theatrical genre, disparate scraps of evidence point to the conclusion that some form of mimetic dancing on mythological/dramatic themes may have been a feature of Roman performances from the early first century BCE.³⁴

With chronological compatibility between the *Ars* and pantomime established, attention must now turn to the lowly genre’s ‘upmarket’ pedigree: from its earliest manifestations, pantomime was consistently perceived as the offspring and generic

³¹ Jory (1981) 154. Cf. Habinek (2005) 107 and Manuwald (2011) 31.

³² On Livy’s understanding of drama as ‘an institution that has undergone a progressive process of decline’ see Feldherr (1998) 165–87 (quote from p. 180).

³³ Jory (1981) 154.

³⁴ See primarily Wiseman (2008a), (2014).

offshoot of classical tragedy itself.³⁵ Bearing in mind this uncontroversial line of filiation between tragedy and pantomime is crucially important. In combination with the fact that myth, the subject matter of the tragic genre, was also pantomime's lifeblood,³⁶ tragic ancestry *can* function as a compass able to guide us through the absence of written literary matter.³⁷ For in the light of this deep abiding continuity, not only is the perceived free flow of mythological matter between the *saltatio* of a *pantomimus* and the *actio* of a *tragoedus* easier to understand,³⁸ but direct comparisons can be made between *fabulae salticae* and tragic plays on the same themes, especially as we are lucky enough to be able to pair tragedy and pantomime on several occasions.³⁹ Was pantomime then the genre most heavily responsible for

³⁵ The *pantomimos* is designated in inscriptions as an 'actor of tragic rhythmic movement' (τραγικὸς ὁ νῦθμος κεινήσεως ὁ ποκριτὴν) and the genre as 'tragic (rhythmic) movement' (τραγικὸς ὁ νῦθμος κείνησις) or even simply 'tragedy set in rhythm' (ὁ νῦθμος τραγικῶς) or 'tragic dancing' (ὁ ρχήσεως τὸς τραγικὸς καλουμένης, Ath. 20d). For full references see Robert (1930) and Lada-Richards (2007) 181 n. 21. On the common ground shared by tragedy and pantomime see Lucian, *Salt.* 31 and *Lib. Or.* 64.112.

³⁶ See Lucian, *Salt.* 37 and 38–61.

³⁷ Although *fabulae salticae*, the 'literature' of the pantomime stage, were being composed until late antiquity to service the needs of a genre that was still thriving well into the sixth century CE, no uncontroversial example of what would have been a voluminous output has survived.

³⁸ See e.g. Suet. *Calig.* 57.4 on Mnester, one of Caligula's favourite dancers, who danced 'the tragedy which the tragedian Neoptolemus had acted years before during the games at which king Philip of Macedon had been assassinated'.

³⁹ With Sophocles' *Ajax* cf. Lucian's story on Ajax's madness (see below); with Euripides' *Heracles* cf. Macrobius' anecdote on Pylades' dancing of the hero's madness (see below);

turning tragedy's conventional way of linking performance space and dramatic action on its head, the offence against tragic decorum which lies at the centre of Horace's preoccupations in *Ars P.* 182–8?

It would seem that, whereas in 'Aristotelian' style tragedy it was the 'offstage' space, away from the audience's direct eyesight, that featured as the locus of intense, violent or even unnatural physical action, in pantomime drama such action was invited to invade the performance's 'onstage' space,⁴⁰ committing thus the kind of crime in tragic staging and composition that Horace deplores. This much can be safely inferred from a story in Lucian's little dialogue *On the Dance*, a priceless narrative (*Salt.* 83–4) on the unfortunate performance of a star dancer dancing 'Ajax going mad immediately after his defeat' and plunging the entire audience into madness by means of an overjealous identification with his part.⁴¹ Replete with a choreography of frenzied leaps and bounds across the Trojan plain,⁴² the consummate dancing of 'Ajax's madness'⁴³ would have been the highlight of the show, not even stopping short of the violence perpetrated against the Trojan flocks (*Salt.* 83). In Sophocles' *Ajax*, on the other hand, the eponymous hero's madness would have been fleshed out with Euripides' *Phaethon* cf. Nonnus' danced version of Phaethon's fall (*Dion.* 30.109–16); with Euripides' *Bacchae* cf. *Anth. Pal.* 16.289 (on Dionysiac roles including Dionysus himself, Cadmus, a Messenger, Agave); with Euripides' *Alcestis* cf. the 'Barcelona Alcestis' (see below). Cf. also the inscriptions mentioned below, n. 48???, and Arn. *Adv. nat.* 4.35, referring to a danced version of Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (*Sophoclis in Trachiniis*).

⁴⁰ Cf. Garelli (2007) 167. Further on this claim see Lada-Richards (2007) 35–6.

⁴¹ See further Lada-Richards (2006).

⁴² Cf. Soph. *Aj.* 29–30. A glimpse of what might have been at stake choreographically can be gleaned from Ath. 629d (on 'frenzied' dances) in conjunction with Poll. *Onom.* 4.102.

⁴³ Lucian, *Salt.* 46 includes □ A□αυτοῦ μανία among notable pantomimic topics.

in the audience's imagination only, as his delusional behaviour was mediated by the narrative of those who either saw it themselves (*Aj.* 61–4, 235–44, 296–304) or heard about it, either in the form of rumour (*Aj.* 141–50) or by means of an eyewitness's report (*Aj.* 29–31). An inversion of tragic decorum is also palpable in the so-called 'Barcelona *Alcestis*', a late (fourth-century CE?) short poem (124 lines) in Latin hexameters on the death of Alcestis, possibly composed as a pantomime libretto or at the very least indicative of 'the type of poetry that an ancient pantomime dancer would have found suitable to realize in his art form'.⁴⁴ While Euripides allows us to 'see' a large part of Alcestis' final moments through what Horace would call 'the eloquence of an eyewitness', the libretto poet dispenses of the 'messenger' function by having Alcestis herself mime and dance her own life's end *coram populo*, in the audience's full view,⁴⁵ until the chill of death takes hold of her body cell by cell and

⁴⁴ The case has been argued by Hall (2008) (quote from p. 282).

⁴⁵ The Euripidean *Alcestis*' significant preparatory actions are reported by one of her maidservants. The most indicative comparison would be between Eur. *Alc.* 152–98 and lines 106–24 of the libretto. It has to be conceded, however, that Euripides' play itself comes extremely close to violating tragic sentiment by allowing Alcestis herself to communicate her vision of Charon (252–6, 259–62), comment on the loss of feeling in her limbs (267), and say her final farewells (389–91). Continued interest in the Euripidean *Alcestis* as a performance text is suggested by *P.Oxy.* 4546, a document relating to a rehearsal of the play in Roman Egypt, some time in the first century BCE or the first half of the first century CE (see Marshall 2004). An *Alcestis* on the pantomime stage of Juvenal's Rome can probably be inferred from Juv. 6.652–3: *spectant subeuntem fata mariti | Alcestim* ('they [*sc.* our wives] watch Alcestis taking upon herself her husband's fate'); cf. Watson and Watson (2014) 279 ad loc., who also adduce Lucian, *Salt.* 52; Juvenal's knowledge of his contemporary pantomime scene is already clear in 6.63–70.

silences her voice for good.⁴⁶ We can easily imagine this final scene as a ‘pictorial’ moment, Alcestis’ rigid limbs held in abeyance in a culminating *tableau*, rhetorical description having given way to pictorial expressiveness. Not only is death onstage not excised; it is carefully underscored by means of a frozen composition which, ‘like an illustrative painting’, gives ‘a visual summary of the emotional situation’, as Peter Brooks (1995) 48 writes on the signifying practices of Victorian melodrama, equally wedded to a dramaturgy of *pathos* concentrated in sensational *tableaux*. Similar comparisons are also possible on the basis of material relevant to Horace’s own time. For Heracles’ madness and kin-killing (the subject of an astoundingly vivid messenger speech in Eur. *HF* 922–1015) were danced onstage by Pylades, the celebrity dancer of Augustan Rome, whose idea of a realistic representation of mental disturbance extended to the shooting of arrows at real-life spectators, not even sparing the emperor himself.⁴⁷ Had Augustan librettists followed a version close to that of Euripides’ play,⁴⁸ actions such as mounting a fictitious chariot (*HF* 947–8), striking

⁴⁶ See lines 117–24 (text and translation in Hall and Wyles 2008, 411–12).

⁴⁷ See Macrob. *Sat.* 2.7.16–17. Of particular interest here is Pylades’ reported insistence on respecting the idiolect of a madman’s locomotion: to those accusing him of transgressing the decorum of a dance performance he apparently retorted: *μωροί, μαινόμενον ὀρχοῦμαι* (‘you idiots, I am supposed to be dancing a madman’). It would seem that actors’ onstage miming in scenes of madness is a performative choice going back to Hellenistic restagings of the old Athenian classics. A scholion on Eur. *Or.* 268, for example, implies that, in blatant violation of the text, actors playing Orestes conjure up an imaginary bow and arrows. See Falkner (2002) 259–60.

⁴⁸ Perhaps even the Euripidean play itself? Among the successful roles of the second-century CE star dancer L. Aurelius Apolaustus Memphius, for example, as listed in an inscription (*CIL* XIV.4254, 199 CE) from Tivoli, some come from adaptations of tragedies by Euripides

imaginary horses with an (imaginary?) whip (*HF* 949), eating an insubstantial banquet (*HF* 956–7), wrestling in unreal games and proclaiming oneself victor over no opponent in front of imagined crowds (*HF* 959_62) or even attacking non-existent walls (*HF* 953–5) would have provided ample opportunities for dazzling displays of solo dancing. Not surprisingly, Lucian, *Salt.* 41 includes in the pantomimic repertoire ‘Heracles together with all his labours and the slaughter of his children’ (cf. *Lib. Or.* 64.70).

Although gradual and protracted over several centuries, then, the passage from classical tragedy to imperial pantomime was almost certainly marked by a seismic shift in notions of aesthetic sensibility and theatrical decorum.⁴⁹ The space and the action which tragic convention allows audiences to glimpse only at a second (or sometimes third) remove through the eyes and perceptual filters of choruses or other *dramatis personae* (primarily messengers) pantomime freely opens up to the

(*Heracles*, *Orestes*, *Trojan Women*, *Bacchae*, *Hippolytus*) and Sophocles (*Tympanistae*); see Jones (1986) 73 with n. 26. Similarly, the inscriptions (*CIL* v.5889) above two mask-holding figures on the sides of the celebratory marble altar from Lodi (now Milan) dedicated to the second-century CE pantomime Theocritus Pylades read ‘IONA’ and ‘TROADAS’, commemorating the *fabulas* (cf. Euripides’ plays) in which the dancer had been victorious; see Cadario (2009).

⁴⁹ However, one should beware of envisaging a simplistic model of teleological progression whereby a genre running out of steam (tragedy) is replaced by its successor (pantomime). Performative traditions continued to exist side by side (cf. *Apul. Flor.* 18.4 on mimes, comic and tragic actors, pantomimes, rope-dancers and miracle workers sharing the Carthaginian stage), exchanging cultural languages and performance vocabularies even when denying all commerce. And tragedy, both ‘old’ and ‘new’, continued being performed in a variety of ways long into the imperial period.

spectator's physical eyesight.⁵⁰ Nothing warrants absolute confidence, but it does seem that in Augustan Rome pantomime was precisely the kind of spectacle where Horace (or Horace's contemporaries) *could* have seen enacted, in the audience's full view, what he vociferously decries: the murder of Medea's children, Atreus' human sacrifice, Procne becoming a bird, Cadmus becoming a snake.⁵¹ Granted that no specific evidence contemporary with the *Ars poetica* exists to testify that these were indeed stories danced in the genre's early history. Conversely, however, there is equally no reason to believe that they would *not* have been among an Augustan dancer's favourite pickings,⁵² given the extensive opportunity for sensationalism and *pathos* they afford. In any case, the broader mythical clusters hosting the particular scenes of horror mentioned by Horace as unsuitable for public viewing were prime pantomimic repertoire until late antiquity.⁵³

⁵⁰ See also Lib. *Or.* 64.110, implying that a keen pantomime viewer would have been able to get his fill of heart-rending deaths enacted, in flesh and blood, onstage.

⁵¹ In Neronian Rome at least, the slaughter of Medea's boys *coram populo* in Seneca's *Medea* is one of many indications of Seneca's adoption of pantomime-specific elements in his dramaturgy; in his *Thyestes* too, the display of the head of the victims of Atreus' 'sacrifice' constitutes the visual climax of the final act (*Th.* 1005). See Zanobi (2008) and (2014).

⁵² Other indications that pantomime had already shown signs of its hallmark affiliation with the greatest mythical and tragic themes can be sought in Macrobian *Sat.* 2.7.12–14 (Agememnon; episodes from the Trojan cycle); Macrobian *Sat.* 2.7.15–16 (Oedipus).

⁵³ Medea: Lucian, *Salt.* 40 (τὴν Μηδείας ὑποδοχὴν), 53 (Medea in Colchis); Apul. *Apol.* 78.4; Lib. *Or.* 64.110 (referring to children killed at their mother's hands); Sid. Apoll. *Carm.* 23.272–6 (the Medea of the Argonautic expedition). The tenth poem of Dracontius' fifth-century CE *Romulea*, an epyllion dedicated to the legend of Medea, deals with the story from the events at Colchis to Medea's infanticide and, crucially, introduces the narrative with the

In one form or another then, it seems that the conventions of lowbrow entertainment⁵⁴ provided in abundance the kind of theatrical business to which

promise to sing what the ‘learned Polyhymnia’, Muse of the pantomime genre (see e.g. Lucian, *Salt.* 36; *Anth. Pal.* 9.504.7; Nonnus, *Dion.* 5.104; Cassiod. *Var.* 4.51.8), speaks silently, in the graceful theatre: *nos illa canemus | quae solet in lepidō Polyhymnia docta theatro | muta loqui* (*Romulea* 10.16–18). Procne: the tale of Philomela’s barbaric rape, culminating in Tereus’ feasting on the flesh of his and Procne’s son, is presented as a pantomimic topic in Sid. Apoll. *Carm.* 23.278–80. Procne’s transformation into a bird is implicit in Lucian’s inclusion of the entire cluster of stories relating to the deeds and sufferings of Pandion’s daughters into the pantomimic repertoire in *Salt.* 40: καὶ τὰς Πανδίωνος [*sc.* θυγατέρας], ἃ τε ἐν Θράκῃ ἔπαθον καὶ ἔπραξαν; cf. Juv. 7.92; Apul. *Apol.* 78.4. Atreus: Atreus’ sacrifice is the act presupposed by Thyestes’ cannibalistic banquet, *prandia ... Thyestae*, a pantomime topic in Sid. Apoll. *Carm.* 23.277 and Lucian, *Salt.* 80 τὰς Θυέστου συμφορὰς, 43 καὶ Ἀτρεὺς καὶ Θυέστης καὶ Ἀερόπη, 67 ἄλλοτε Ἀτρεὺς ὁ αὐτός, καὶ μετὰ μικρὸν Θυέστης (on Atreus and Thyestes as contrasting roles adopted in the same *fabula*). An ancient *scholion* on Lucan (Berne scholiast on Luc. 1.543–4) raises the possibility that Atreus’ sacrificial slaughter of his brother’s sons was part of the early Roman mime repertoire, at a time where the borderline between mime and pantomime was at its greatest state of fluidity and indeterminacy: see Wiseman (2008b) 147–8. Cadmus’ transformation is also included in Lucian’s survey of pantomime themes in *Salt.* 41 καὶ αὖθις τοῦ Κάδμου εἰς δράκοντα μεταβολή.

⁵⁴ A more comprehensive look into the ‘underbelly’ of Roman theatrical culture would have to take into account the medley of other subliterate spectacles, especially the mime, and, most importantly, the coarse, slapstick version of the genre. The ‘Laureolus’ mime, in particular, seems to have thrived on make-believe bloodbaths (see e.g. Suet. *Calig.* 57.4). For real stunts of disembowelment, such as the ‘live’ slaughter of an ox, see Petron. 59, with Artemidorus (4.2), who considers the skilful execution of sham deaths onstage by troupes of Homerists as

Horace's theoretical principles would rather deny legitimate existence on the Roman stage. Although Horace's own thoughts are irrecoverable, the possibility that his prohibitions in *Ars P.* 182–8 were, at least in part, a specific, targeted reaction to what he may have considered as vulgar contemporary practices cannot be rejected out of hand.⁵⁵ Equally untenable would be any dogmatic assertion that the mental processing of Horace's lines on Medea and Atreus, Cadmus and Procne by late first-century BCE readers could *not* have been mediated by the stage experience of pantomime dancing. It is simply impossible to overestimate the enormity of pantomime's pulling power across socio-cultural stratifications in the life of Augustan Rome. The highest and the lowest, emperor and knight, plebeian and senator alike feasted avidly on its aesthetic fare, a cultural commodity that circulated freely not only on the stage and the *triclinia* of the rich but on the banks of the Tiber, where its most successful ditties, the i-tune hits of the day, were picked up by (professional?) dancing girls and the plebs (Ov. *Fast.* 3.535–8).

their professional speciality. A hint to the devices used in such performances, props that would have allowed, say, Medea to 'kill' her children *coram populo*, we get from an entirely different context, Leucippe's *Scheintod* in Ach. Tat. 3.21.4–6, where the mechanism of a trick knife with a retractable blade (obviously aiming at high levels of illusionism) is laid bare.

⁵⁵ We can easily imagine Horace wary of the cultural product that enjoys mass appeal – anything that panders to theatrical crowds moaning like the Apulian forest or the Tuscan sea (*Epist.* 2.1.182–207). Cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.10.73 *neque te ut miretur turba labores* ('do not strive to be admired by the crowd'). On Horace as 'an elitist', see Lowrie (2009) 257. More generally on Horace's fear of vulgarisation, see Feeney (2002) and (2009).

II. Pantomime in Horace's field of vision?

Circumscribing a range of possibilities is altogether different from establishing the parameters of historical truth. But, while the question whether Horace did or did not have pantomime and its insidious influence in mind when casting his vote of disapproval on the theatricalisation of the marvellous and the abhorrent cannot be decided with anything approaching even a semblance of certainty, we do have a sufficient number of explicit 'markers'⁵⁶ left on Horace's work itself to document the proposition that pantomime was indeed a firm, recurrent presence in the poet's field of cultural vision. On this matter at least we find ourselves on safe ground, for Horace's verse betrays an easy familiarity with his contemporary dance scene.

In *Sat.* 1.5 (datable to 38/37 BCE) he casually reports how one *scurra* begged another to 'dance "the shepherd Cyclops"' (*pastorem saltaret uti Cyclopa rogabat*, 63), employing already the trope whereby the verb *saltare*, one of the technical words for dancing, governs an internal accusative, which is the syntax characteristic of references to fully fledged pantomimes in both Greek and Latin sources until deep into late antiquity.⁵⁷ For Garton (1982) 582 this is 'theatre language which borders very close upon, if it does not directly refer to, pantomime'. In *Sat.* 2.6.72 the merits and demerits of the *archimimus*⁵⁸ Lepos' dance (*nec male necne Lepos saltet*) is the implied subject of trivial dinner gossip, the normal fare of high-society parties, while the sixth of Horace's *Roman Odes* plays upon the typical association of polished female dancing with sexual licence (*Carm.* 3.6.21–4).

⁵⁶ For the notion of a 'marker' see Ben-Porat (1976), albeit referring to literary allusions between texts.

⁵⁷ Kokolakis (1976).

⁵⁸ According to Porphyrio's scholion ad loc.

The most interesting Horatian reference to dance by far comes in the *Letter to Florus* (19 BCE), where he draws an implicit parallel between poet and mimetic dancer, both of whom must reach such a high level of artistic skill that, although in reality they put themselves through painful effort, they manage to convey an impression of ease and playfulness – in other words, they manage to conceal their art.⁵⁹ Thus, the good (*bonus*) poet, courageous enough to censor his own writings (cf. *Sat.* 1.10.72–3),

ludentis speciem dabit et torquebitur, ut qui
nunc Satyrum, nunc agrestem Cyclopa mouetur⁶⁰ (*Epist.* 2.2.124–5)

will give the impression of being at play while (in reality) torturing himself, like someone dancing now the role of a satyr now that of the rustic Cyclops.

Porphyrio's scholion *torquebitur et fatigabitur ut pantomimus* ('he will twist and tire himself like a pantomime dancer', ad loc.)⁶¹ implies a reading of Horace's line as a

⁵⁹ See Rudd (1989) 16: 'The final metaphor is that of a dancer who can represent the agile and the ponderous with equal ease; but that ease is deceptive, for it has been acquired by painful effort (124–5)'.

⁶⁰ *Mouere* functions as an alternative to *saltare* in a wide range of texts, with *mouere membra* or *bracchia* in particular as a metonymy for dancing. See e.g. Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.24–5; App. Verg. *Copa*, 1–2; most fully in Ov. *Ars am.* 3.349–50.

⁶¹ Besides Porphyrio, Brink (1982) 347 ad 124 adduces Galen (*De sanitate tuenda* 2.11 Kühn VI.155.4–8) and his medical insights into the health benefits arising from the jerky, twisting acrobatics of the pantomimic body.

clear nod in the direction of danced spectacles.⁶² In the light of Plutarch's reference to Bathyllus' dance as imitative of bucolic love tales, it is not impossible that Horace would have had in mind the pastoral and satyric element that defined the jolly⁶³ character of Bathyllus' branch of pantomime dancing, 'involving the imitation of Echo or some Pan or Satyr revelling with Eros' (Ἠχοῦς ἢ τινος Πανὸς ἢ Σατύρου σὺν Ἑρωτι κωμάζοντος ὑπόρχημά τι διατιθεμένην).⁶⁴ Persius, for one, while imitating Horace's line, seems to understand Horace's verse as referring to Bathyllus' 'signature' form of dance: 'you could not dance the Satyr of Bathyllus as far as the first three steps' (*nec ... tris tantum ad numeros Satyrum moueare Bathylli*, 5.122–3; trans. Braund 2004). Moreover, in the light of our further knowledge that the legendary Bathyllus himself was the 'grand passion' of Horace's own patron, the star-struck Maecenas,⁶⁵ the assumption of pantomime 'interference' in the lines of the *Ars*

⁶² Barchiesi (2006) 419 n. 30 refers to the Cyclops of the *Epist.* 2.2.124–5 as 'a pantomime hero'. Cf. Garelli (2007) 116. Interestingly, this would not be the only time one would find Horace looking across the fence into the playground of subliterate entertainment in search of a model for the poet's art: an excellent parallel is *Epist.* 2.1.210–13, where the poet capable of transporting his reader 'now to Thebes, now to Athens' is compared to the master of a tight-rope act and the wielder of a magician's illusionist power.

⁶³ Athenaeus gives us a fleeting insight into the nature of Bathyllus' preferred type of dancing by calling it 'more gay, lighthearted' (ἱλαρωτέρα) (20e) than that favoured by Pylades. Cf. Seneca (the Elder), *Controv.* 3, *praef.* 10.

⁶⁴ Plut. *Mor.* 711e–f. Athenaeus and Plutarch may well be deriving information from the same (lost) source.

⁶⁵ See Tac. *Ann.* 1.54.2; Dio Cass. 54.17.5. Is Horace mischievously teasing Maecenas about his all-consuming flame for Bathyllus in *Epod.* 14.9–16, using Anacreon and Bathyllus as subterfuge? For a casual reference to Horace and Maecenas watching the *ludi* together see

under discussion becomes eminently plausible. Camouflaged and understated, the subliminal reference to pantomime-inspired idioms may well have been one of the earliest illustrations of the volcanic impact Pylades' and Bathyllus' dance reforms had not only on Rome's contemporary art scene but also on contemporary literary minds.

Finally, special attention deserves the end of Horace's 'Lalage' ode, homing in on an effeminate youth indistinguishable from maidens in the midst of dancing:

(Gyges) quem si puellarum insereres choro,
mire sagaces falleret hospites
discrimen obscurum solutis
crinibus ambiguoque uultu (*Carm.* 2.5.21–4)

(Gyges) whom if you were to place in a group of dancing girls, discerning guests would be wondrously deceived by the blurring of distinction by means of his flowing hair and sexually indeterminate looks.⁶⁶

Nisbet and Hubbard rightly detect in Horace's verses an allusion to the 'Achilles on Scyros' myth,⁶⁷ to which the poet refers explicitly in *Carm.* 1.8.13–16, when comparing the effeminised Sybaris to 'the son of marine Thetis' hiding in female garb before going to Troy. But, quite apart from being a hit with visual artists,

Sat. 2.6.48. Can we imagine Horace so tactless as to cast aspersions on his patron's favourite pastime? If pantomime does loom in the background, it is certainly camouflaged well enough to be innocuous.

⁶⁶ My translation loosely follows Hinds (1998) 136.

⁶⁷ Nisbet and Hubbard (1978) 91 ad 21; so does Rosati (1992) 238–9; see now also Myers (2015) 185.

mythographers and poets in the Hellenistic period and beyond,⁶⁸ Achilles' transvestism among the daughters of King Lycomedes at Scyros was a beloved pantomime topic until late antiquity,⁶⁹ ideal for showcasing self-referentially the dancer's gender-bending versatility: whether incarnating 'Achilles playing at being a virgin girl' (τὸν Ἀχιλλέα ... παρθένον ὑποκρινόμενον) or Achilles 'the man in Troy' (τὸν ἐν Τροίᾳ), terrifying in the wielding of his ashen spear, bringer of death and destruction (Lib. *Or.* 64.68), the dancer was required to persuade his viewers not that he 'imitates' (μιμεῖται) but that 'he is by nature' (πέφυκε) the very object of his imitation (Choricus, *Or.* 21.1 Foerster-Richsteig).

Might Horace's particular way of 'zooming in' on the *puer delicatus* Gyges have been inspired by the notoriously 'look alike' feminine appearance of the professional *saltator*? It is the pantomime par excellence who, 'moulding his pliant flank to suit either sex' (*aptans lentum sexum ad utrumque latus*),⁷⁰ creates a perfect illusion of the female form – so perfect that onlookers, fascinated, cannot but succumb to the pleasurable deception. In Columella's words,

⁶⁸ On the enormous popularity of the 'young Achilles in female dress' motif across literary and visual media (wall paintings, mosaics, sarcophagi) see primarily Cyrino (1998); Heslin (2005); Cameron (2009); McAuley (2010); Fantuzzi (2012). Horace's explicit preference for a poetic Achilles fashioned as 'active, irascible, implacable and fierce' (*impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer*, *Ars P.* 121) may well be tinged with the desire to keep serious poetry unsullied from incursions of pantomime taste, such as exemplified in pantomime's privileging of a 'soft' and transvestite Achilles.

⁶⁹ See Lucian, *Salt.* 46: Ἀχιλλέως ἐν Σκύρῳ παρθένευσις ('the virgin life of Achilles in Scyros'); Lib. *Or.* 64.55 and especially 68.

⁷⁰ *Anth. Lat.* 100 (ed. Shackleton Bailey), line 2.

attonitique miramur gestus effeminatorum, quod a natura sexum uiris denegatum muliebri motu mentiantur decipiantque oculos spectantium.

As if struck by thunder, we are lost in admiration of the gestures of effeminate males, the reason being that with their womanish motion they feign the sex denied to men by nature and (thus) deceive the eyes of the viewers. (Columella, *Rust.* 1, *Pref.* 15)⁷¹

Moreover, it is, again, the pantomime par excellence who, ambivalently gendered and modifying ‘his sex by means of his art’ (Cyprian, *Ep.* 2.2), offers the audience an unrivalled variety of erotic titillation,⁷² much like Gyges, whose ‘very sexual indeterminacy (*ambiguo uultu*) ... renders him ... sexually available’.⁷³ Statius, who tried his hand at least once at composing a *fabula saltica* (Juv. 7.86–7), draws

⁷¹ Not surprisingly, our most eloquent informants here are the Fathers of the early Christian church. St John Chrysostom, for example, conceptualises the dancer as a long-haired youth who, ‘effeminating (ἐκθηλύνων) his nature’, ‘struggles emulously’ by means of his glances, overall deportment and clothing to ‘step out (ἐκβῆναι) from his own territory into the image of a tender virgin (εἰς εἰκόνα κόρης ἀπαλῆς)’ (*PG* 57.426); similarly, in *PG* 49.195 Chrysostom’s dancer is said to be ‘forcing himself to trespass into the feminine gender (εἰς τὸ θῆλυ γένος)’... Even after the layers of distorting bias have been peeled away, there does remain the overall impression of an artist trained from childhood onwards to imitate with the highest degree of verisimilitude the female roles of which the pantomime genre was, unquestionably, full to the brim.

⁷² Among a vast pool of possible examples, see Novatian, *Spect.* 6.6 on the entire civic community being thrown into raptures on account of a creature of indeterminate gender identity.

⁷³ Myers (2015) 184.

attention precisely to the disguised Achilles' elision of gender difference, successful enough to trick bystanders: 'escaping notice by a fine dividing line, his indeterminate sex deceives those looking on' (*fallitque tuentes | ambiguus tenuique latens discrimine sexus*, *Achil.* 1.336–7).⁷⁴ Whether 'Statius has "recognized" and appropriated a veiled reference to Achillean myth in Horace', as Hinds astutely suggests,⁷⁵ is impossible to ascertain. But it is equally impossible to rule out the likelihood that an 'Achilles at Scyros' pantomime, built around the story of a transvestite *ballerino* 'concealed under the image of false sex' (*occultum falsi sub imagine sexus*, *Stat. Achil.* 1.560) in the midst of choruses of Scyrian maidens, left an indelible imprint on Horace's imagination.⁷⁶

Vital clues, then, for a contextualised reading of lines 182–8 of Horace's *Ars poetica* have been overlooked, lying, as they do, outside the 'textual', literary tradition, the usual 'catchment area' for research into a poetic work. Yet, as I hope to have shown thus far, not only had Horace taken notice of the new sensation that was

⁷⁴ Alternative translation: 'hiding itself in a narrow distinction'. For a fascinating kaleidoscopic reading of this particular couple of lines from Statius see Feeney (2004). For gender (and genre)-specific readings of Statius' Scyrian episode see also Cyrino (1998), esp. 227–39; Hinds (2000), esp. 236–44; Barchiesi (2005); Heslin (2005); Russell (2014). Horatian echoes in the *Achilleid* are discussed in Myers (2015); on Achilles in Horace's *Ars* and the *Achilleid* see Kozak (2014) 217–21.

⁷⁵ Hinds (1998) 135–6, preceded by Rosati (1992) 238–9; cf. McAuley (2010) 47–8. For Myers (2015) 184 this is the 'best known echo of Horace in the *Achilleid*', occurring 'at the pivotal point in the narrative when Thetis has just "transformed" Achilles into a girl'.

⁷⁶ While pantomime does not enter Horatian scholarship with respect to the 'Lalage' ode, it is an acknowledged presence in scholarship on Statius. See most importantly Barchiesi (2005) 62.

the dance of the Augustan pantomime masters but the genre itself was, in objective terms, the culprit par excellence, responsible for upsetting the ‘Aristotelian’ balance between ‘seen’ and ‘unseen’ action on the stage⁷⁷ by means of its overt theatricalisation of the marvellous and the abhorrent residing in mythic plots. With its consistent validation of vision over hearing, the ocular, spectacular idiom of the subliterate was cut from the same aesthetic cloth as the theatrical fashion Horace despised. One crucial question, however, remains unanswered and will be properly addressed in the following section.

III. Why would Horace bother with the cultural subaltern?

Despite the fact that poets of the standing of Statius and Lucan are said to have composed *fabulas salticas*,⁷⁸ it is highly unlikely that the poetics of pantomime libretti *per se* would have entered the realm of Horace’s preoccupations.⁷⁹ Until very late antiquity *fabulae salticae* had a bad reputation as works of paltry literary value. Sidonius Apollinaris (*Ep.* 8.9.5) in the late fifth century CE refers to pantomime songs (presumably contained in the libretto) as ‘bad poetry’ (*male dictata*), only managing to sound acceptable by means of the pantomime chorus’ nice singing (*bono cantu*). Similarly Libanius, in the fourth century CE and in a treatise in defence of the genre,

⁷⁷ Cf. Lowrie (2009) 255 on the very similar issues arising from Horace’s *Letter to Augustus* (*Epist.* 2.1).

⁷⁸ On Statius see above, p. 000. Vacca’s life of Lucan records fourteen *fabulas salticas* extant in his own day, five centuries later.

⁷⁹ Unless, of course, this is our own bias speaking, bearing the imprint of an entire matrix of cultural prejudices, not least the innate suspicion of what has not been consecrated as part of a canon.

has no qualms admitting that the songs sung in pantomime cannot boast the literary quality of Sappho or Anacreon (*Or.* 64.87).⁸⁰ Closer to Horace's own time, Seneca the Elder pours contempt on the (for us) shadowy figure of Abronius Silo's son: by composing *fabulas* for the dancers (*pantomimis*), he 'not only wasted but also defiled' (*non tantum deseruit sed polluit*) a 'great talent' (*ingenium grande*, *Suas.* 2.19).⁸¹ Whether Horace shared such a disparaging view and looked down upon ephemeral 'literature' destined to vanish at the close of the show is impossible to gauge.⁸² But no matter how fervently he gunned for the acceptance of novelty in poetic language and composition,⁸³ one may legitimately assume that, qua literary products, pantomime libretti themselves would have been moving far below Horace's cultural antennae to have had anything to do with the concerns over real dramatic poetry expressed in the *Ars*.

Assuming that this is so, and if I am right to detect pantomime's performative coding in the cultural weave of lines 182–8, how can we explain Horace's dive into

⁸⁰ Albeit adding that this is of little consequence, for the only thing that matters to pantomime fans is the quality of the dancer's performance, which the songs are meant to support (*Or.* 64.88).

⁸¹ On issues associated with pantomime libretti see Hall (2008); Hunt (2008); Jory (2008).

⁸² Cf. Horace's ambivalent glance in the direction of Laberius' mimes in *Sat.* 1.10.5–6 *nam sic | et Laberi mimos ut pulchra poemata mirer* ('for on that principle I should also admire Laberius' mimes as aesthetically pleasing poems'). One may enjoy the mimes of Laberius but one shouldn't also have to judge them as exquisite poetry.

⁸³ See e.g. *Epist.* 2.1.63–5, 76–7, 90–2; cf. *Ars P.* 53–72 on the subject of neologisms, Horace himself, 'the senior but also the modern poet', being 'aligned here with the young upstarting word' (Oliensis 1998, 215 and 206–15). Cf. Lowrie (2009) 242: 'Horace is a committed modern'; Goldberg (2005) 175.

the ‘slums of theatricality’⁸⁴ while thinking about literary poetics in the *Ars*? This particular question becomes potentially more complex when we consider (a) that the number of professional dramatists had been dwindling already in the decades after Accius’ death (c. 90 BCE) and (b) that Horace himself not only never tried his hand in tragic composition but, as Lowrie (2014) 123 reminds us, even ‘spent a certain amount of poetic capital disavowing the genre along with epic and history (e.g., *Odes* 1.6, 2.1, *Epistles* 2.1) because of its association with the high style and along with it uncomfortable political themes’.

Nevertheless, Horace’s way of relegating transgressive idiolects in tragic composition/staging beyond the furthest limits of generic legitimacy is perfectly in line with the innumerable acts of cultural mapping and exercises in cultural self-fashioning taking place at all levels and in all corners of the elite experience, in both the Greek and Latin speaking side of the Mediterranean. It was in such exercises par excellence that lowbrow expressive idioms came to ‘serve as a foil, a negative reference point’, in relation to which ‘high class aesthetics’ could define itself through a series of ‘successive negations’.⁸⁵ Pronouncements of taste in particular express themselves through ‘the refusal of other tastes’,⁸⁶ and authoritative views on what constitutes wholesome, liberal entertainment are best expressed in a negative fashion. To borrow from Aelius Aristides’ language of cultural differentiation, for example, a netherland of illiberal tastes and low-class entertainers is the necessary cultural foil for the philosopher’s and the orator’s declamatory art to rise to the top:

⁸⁴ I borrow the expression from Mignogna (1997) 236 (‘i “bassifondi” della teatralità’), a discussion of the subliterate in Achilles Tatius.

⁸⁵ Bourdieu (1984) 57.

⁸⁶ Bourdieu (1984) 56.

καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸ κακεῖνο, οὐ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον, οἶμαι, τῷ τε ῥήτορι καὶ φιλοσόφῳ καὶ
πᾶσι δὴ τοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίου παιδείας προσήκει τέρπειν τοὺς ὄχλους καὶ τοῖς
ἀνδραποδώδεσι τούτοις ὀρχησταῖς, μίμοις, θαυματοποοῖς.

And this other thing as well, it is not fitting, I think, for the orator and the philosopher
and all those involved in liberal education to please the masses in the same way that
these servile fellows do, the pantomimes and mimes and jugglers. (*Or.* 34.55)

Similarly, instead of instructing the Piso boys uniquely in the manner of ‘you must
do X’, where X carries a positive, normative value, Horace splices the positive (*Ars P.*
183–4) with the negative route of ‘do not do Y’ (*Ars P.* 185–7), spelling out what he
rejects before exorcising it outrightly: *incredulus odi* (188). Just as Quintilian
demarcates oratorical legitimacy in the first century CE by posting the unruly,
effeminised bodies of the actor and the dancer at its outermost edges,⁸⁷ Horace
circumscribes tragic decorum by disengaging it from the wayward practices of
lowbrow theatrical attractions.⁸⁸ If we were to decode the passage of the *Ars*

⁸⁷ On the problematic boundary between Roman rhetoric and the stage see (among a
voluminous bibliography) the inspiring discussions of Richlin (1997), Gunderson (1998) and
Fantham (2002).

⁸⁸ Cf. Oliensis (1998) 202, drawing on Bourdieu’s work to argue that the oppositions defining
the opening lines of the *Ars* ‘serve to create and maintain a distinction between the knowing
spectators and the foolish spectacle, the empowered subjects and the disenfranchised, vulgar
object’. As White (1993) 53 very rightly notes, ‘For the great majority of poets with no
personal stake in it, the theater remained an ideological reference point as the embodiment par
excellence of public poetry.’ Cf. Dumont and François-Garelli (1998) 136 on Horace

contextually, along the lines suggested in this article, its message would read: don't compose your tragedy as if you were a pantomime librettist or as if you were sketching out a mime plot; generic boundaries *must* be in place at all times and everyone *must* scrupulously adhere to them. By using the performative languages of the subaltern as a convenient 'margin of mess',⁸⁹ Horace anchors tragedy where his Aristotelian/Peripatetic principles dictate it should be placed: in the sphere of the verbal, occupying a space of articulate language and sophisticated storytelling. In this respect then, *Ars P.* 182–8 has preserved a distant echo of some of the fiercest battles in the ancient performance world, waged between traditional, literary drama, 'the agonistic arts' (Lucian, *Salt.* 2) of Tragedy and Comedy, versus an undifferentiated torrent of newer or derivative dramatic forms and quasi-theatrical attractions.

Shoring up tragic decorum against popular performance practices need not have been a purely academic exercise on Horace's part.⁹⁰ In the first place, there was indeed in his contemporary Rome an army of specialised and increasingly professional performers of high visibility against whom any poet yearning for a mass audience and affirming his distance from the *plebs*, as opposed to embarking on an Augustan programme of restoring a popular theatre.

⁸⁹ A term used by anthropologist Barbara Babcock (1978) 28: 'We seem to need a "margin of mess", a category of "inverted beings" both to define and to question the orders by which we live.'

⁹⁰ If I am right that Horace relies on the shocking value of the 'live' cannibalism motif to drive a wedge between properly composed, 'Aristotelian', tragedy and the derivative practices and forms that inundate his contemporary Roman stage, it is extremely interesting that, about a century after Horace, Persius revisits the trope of the cannibalistic meal to go a step further than Horace, namely to drive a wedge between his own wholesome, "vegetarian" verse and his rivals' disgusting and inappropriate fare' (Bartsch 2015, 15).

popular recognition would have had to be measured.⁹¹ It is not without reason that Horace's own unwillingness to court the *plebs* (e.g. *Epist.* 1.19.37; *Sat.* 1.4.71–4, 1.10.73) or recite (*recitare*) lightweight matter (*nugas*) in crowded theatres (*spissis theatris*, *Epist.* 1.19.41–2; cf. *Sat.* 1.4.73–4) is pitted against the vulgar promotional tactics of celebrity singer Hermogenes Tigellius, the 'Prince' of Republican Rome.⁹² Secondly, the paucity of new drama in the late Republic must not obscure from view the vibrant culture of theatrical revivals of early Roman plays, a tradition well established from the age of Cicero onwards⁹³ and even attested by Horace himself in his *Epistle to Augustus*: 'these are the poets mighty Rome packs the narrow theatre to see' (*hos arto stipata theatro | spectat Roma potens*).⁹⁴ Vintage plays were adapted to suit the demands of a different age and audience – by all accounts the overwhelming preference was for 'impressive staging, stunning effects, violent utterances and actions, magnificent costumes and elaborate stage properties over meaningful dialogue' (Manuwald 2011, 115). Not surprisingly, the trend was resented by intellectuals from Cicero to Horace, the latter complaining of cavalry and infantry, chariots, carriages and ships, captive kings and lavish spoils paraded on the stage (*Epist.* 2.1.189–93).⁹⁵ Why are tragic revivals significant in the context of the present

⁹¹ Cf. White (1993) 53, a picture I find immensely convincing.

⁹² See especially *Sat.* 1.2 and 1.3, with White (1993) 53 on Tigellius serving as a foil.

⁹³ On the Roman culture of revivals of early Roman drama from the time of Cicero onwards see Manuwald (2011) 112–19; for an extensive discussion see Wright (1931) 31–79.

⁹⁴ *Epist.* 2.1.60–1, referring to (on the side of tragic poets) Ennius, Naevius, Accius and Pacuvius.

⁹⁵ Cf. Cic. *Fam.* 7.1.2, with respect to the 'Hollywood-style' restaging of (probably) Accius' *Clytemnestra* and Naevius' *Equus Troianus* at the inauguration of Pompey's new theatre in 55 BCE. See Goldberg (1996) 265–8 and (2005) 124.

inquiry? Assuming that revivals of plays such as Accius' *Atreus* and *Tereus* or Ennius' *Thyestes* and *Medea* continued (even at a reduced frequency) well into Horace's generation, it is entirely possible that *they* were, in part, the source of that elusive contemporary 'motive' and 'cue' for grief that we consider absent from the *Ars*. For if tragic performances had already in Cicero's time 'taken on the trappings' of subliterate shows such as lush triumphs and processions,⁹⁶ why wouldn't they have taken on, by Horace's time, the trappings of the most popular of new sensations, the aesthetics of mime and pantomime dancing? Although copious ink has been spilt on such revivals as the barometers of political temperature in the late Republic, scholarship has failed to appreciate them equally as 'hybrid' constructions,⁹⁷ speaking the elite language of the dramatist's verse while having also incorporated the 'accent' and the 'style' of a hodgepodge of other, 'parvenu-languages'⁹⁸ belonging to the broader space of entertainment culture. It was there, this article contends, on such an increasingly 'bilingual' cultural terrain, that Tragedy, in the form of adaptations, could potentially indulge in meretricious courting of subliterate traditions, plunging the genre deep into uncharted territory and certainly beyond the realm of what would have been envisaged as 'appropriate' and 'fitting'. It is moreover far from inconceivable that Horace's aesthetic sensibilities clashed repeatedly with fashions imported from the 'lowlands' of the theatrical landscape precisely in the course of explosively visual stagings of revived Roman 'classics'. The numerous days per year

⁹⁶ See Goldberg (1996) 266.

⁹⁷ For the notion of a 'double-accented, double-styled hybrid construction' as containing 'mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages", two semantic and axiological belief systems' see Bakhtin (1981) 304–5.

⁹⁸ Bakhtin (1981) 357.

devoted to theatre by the end of the Republic must have provided ample opportunity not only for voyeuristic dwelling on cannibal-style meals⁹⁹ but also for overwhelming emotional intensity sparked off by visual highlights such as onstage death and transformation.¹⁰⁰ And, while a generic purist like Horace might not have felt outraged watching a *pantomime*'s Medea dance out her infanticide *coram populo*, he would certainly have been offended by a *tragic* Medea's resorting to 'showing' as opposed to 'telling' in the course of a reconfigured Roman classic. What would have been at stake in such a context is not the subliterate *per se* but the perceived degradation of gender-specific proprieties in the midst of high culture's deplorable effort to keep up with it – or, even worse, to supersede it.

IV. From 'virtual' to 'physical' seeing

Before bringing the piece to a close I would like to complete the picture by taking a more detailed look at the cultural shift to which the polemical verses of the *Ars* respond, namely the displacement of 'horror' and 'marvel' from the realm of the 'heard' to the realm of the 'seen',¹⁰¹ the physically enacted, the performer's

⁹⁹ Accius' *Tereus*, a play much revived under the Republic, may well have been marked by a strong predilection for the violence, blood and horror which heralds Seneca's tragedies (Dumont and François-Garelli 1998, 123), thus providing an already high starting point for gruesome reworkings in the context of revivals.

¹⁰⁰ This is not to dismiss Republican tragic revivals as nothing more than empty show and melodrama. Internalising the *pathos* inherent in tragic verse, performing giants of the ilk of Aesopus, Rupilius and Diphilus created an experience of seemingly genuine emotional participation and thrilled their audiences as a result.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Meisel (2007) 44: 'what one hears and what one sees constitute the grid of the play. They are coordinates like x and y, extensions like length and breadth, between them

‘corporeal’ and ‘gestural’ space. For this was nothing short of a landslide change in audience sensibilities and theatrical decorum, with far-reaching repercussions that cut deep in both compositional and performative practices. Qualities such as *enargeia* (vividness), which were inextricably interwoven with artfully composed *logos* in the realm of traditional drama,¹⁰² became the property of the performer’s staged body in the colourful idioms of subliterate performance genres. Thus, whereas it is the vividness of Euripides’ *lexis* which enables the audience to ‘see’ what the poet has imagined, such as the invisible Furies (Long. *Subl.* 15.2), on the popular stage of pantomime dancing the burden of giving shape to the ineffable and inexpressible, the absent, the gruesome or the magical falls solely on the *saltator*’s exceptionally expressive body: ‘he will compel you to see Troy falling here and now and Priam cut down before your very eyes’ (*cogetque uidere | praesentem Troiam Priamumque ante ora cadentem*), enthuses Manilius (*Astron.* 5.484–5)¹⁰³ on the career of the man born under the sign of Cepheus and destined for the stage boards. This is not to say that in the corporeal dramaturgy of mime and pantomime no demands were ever made on the spectator’s ‘eye of the mind’. On the contrary, as pantomime’s highly sensational subject matter eschews the possibility of truly realistic presentation (how can one, literally, *become* a snake?), the artist has no choice other than ask spectators to, as it were, ‘piece out’ visual ‘imperfections’ with their ‘thoughts’.¹⁰⁴ But, although the

generating the play as a shape developing through time. They are the stuff of the play, the currency of the transaction between stage and audience wherein the play lives.’

¹⁰² It is this kind of *enargeia* that Horace admires in *Epist.* 2.1.213 (cf. n.x above).

¹⁰³ We could perhaps compare Libanius’ passing reference (*Or.* 64.115) to the collapsing of ancient kingdoms as a common theme presented by the dancer’s bodily art.

¹⁰⁴ As in Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, Prologue 23.

audience's collusion is still necessary, the appeal to their 'imaginary forces'¹⁰⁵ is made by means of the visual as opposed to the verbal, the spectacle's *opsis* rather than the poet's *logos*.

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that the 'melodramatic' excess with its shameless indulging of the ocular deplored in the *Ars* would not have been a state of affairs reached overnight. The precise pathways taken in the tortuous journey from the older to the newer are now irrecoverable, yet some faint traces of intermediary stops may have been preserved in the figurative arts. It is the splendid South Italian pottery of the fourth century BCE in particular which seems to have captured somewhere midway the trajectory from tragedy's style of implicit evocation to pantomime's mode of actual presentation. An artefact such as the Apulian vase attributed to the Darius Painter and dated in the 340s BCE, for example,¹⁰⁶ displays side by side *both* the act of narrating a scene of violent death (cf. Horace's 'eloquence of an eyewitness') *and* that same narrative's ultimate effect, the emerging picture which, far from remaining a mental image only, becomes literal enough for the beholder's bodily eye to absorb and relish (the pantomime mode).¹⁰⁷ As if defying the a-temporality of the iconographic medium, Hippolytus' gruesome death, the subject of a virtuosic

¹⁰⁵ See the Shakespearean Chorus' plea to the spectators to 'let us ... on your imaginary forces work' (*King Henry V*, Prologue 17–18), so that they could witness the battle of Agincourt.

¹⁰⁶ London, British Museum F279, a volute krater; for pictures see Taplin (2007) 137–8.

¹⁰⁷ Among sources attributing to pantomime a pictorial dramaturgy see primarily Lucian, *Salt.* 35; Aristaenetus, *Ep.* 1.26; both Plutarch and Libanius speak of the dancers' bodily configurations frozen in space and time as if in a picture (Plut. *Mor.* 747c), their statue-like stillness culminating in a *tableau-vivant* onstage (Lib. *Or.* 64.118). See further Garelli (2007) 357–62; Lada-Richards (2003b), (2004).

rhēsis in Euripides' play (*Hipp.* 1173–1254), unfolds on the lower iconographic register where the gesticulating figure of a 'little old man' seems to be pointing (pantomime's constitutive concept of *deixis/ostentatio*)¹⁰⁸ to a youth struggling to keep control of his chariot while a bull is seen emerging from beneath the horses' front hooves.



Figure 1. Apulian volute crater, c. 340 BCE (British Museum F279).

If Richard Green's reading of this category of South Italian vases is correct, the figure of the 'little Old Man' in the 'Hippolytus' volute krater as well as in some fifty-three similar funerary vessels is the iconographic pointer to the theatrical convention of the tragic messenger/actor,¹⁰⁹ usually the most talented member of an acting troupe.¹¹⁰ His

¹⁰⁸ It is hard to overestimate the relevance of *deixis/ostentatio* to pantomime dancing, a discipline of imitation (*mimētikē*) and demonstration (*deiktikē*), as Lucian's pantomime defender Lycinus asserts (*Salt.* 36). See *Salt.* 62, 67; *Lib. Or.* 64.113; *Plut. Mor.* 747c–e; when *deixis* is mastered well, its clarity and evidential value correspond to that of proper names in poetry (747e).

¹⁰⁹ Green (1999); cf. Chamay and Cambitoglou (1980); Easterling (2004).

¹¹⁰ All the while the tragic genre was evolving, its messenger parts became increasingly demanding and complex; in them were built not only exquisite *pathos* but also elaborate pictorial narratives; see Green (1999) 53 and Hall (2007) 282–3; cf. Easterling (2004). No

tonal and gestural register would have been able to conjure up most graphically the kind of scene unlikely to be performed in the flesh onstage, from the misadventure of a body mauled by dogs, mangled by bacchantes or trampled upon by horse-hooves to rape and perverted, unnatural love to magical *metamorphosis*. As if offering a visual explanation of literary/rhetorical tropes and concepts such as *ecphrasis* and *phantasia*, the vase exhibits both stages involved in successful description or fertile visualisation: gripped by emotion, the gesturing figure (on the left) seems to *see* what he describes (stage 1) and puts it visually (on the right) before his audience's eyes (stage 2) – an audience which happens to coincide with the viewer(s) of the artefact itself. As if providing a visual translation of Longinus' well-known passage on *eidolopoeia* or *phantasia*, the painter illustrates a situation where, under the influence of 'enthusiasm' (*enthousiasmos*) and 'strong emotion' (*pathos*), the speaker thinks he sees (βλέπειν) what he describes and puts it before his audience's eyes (ὑπ' ὄψιν) (Longinus, *Subl.* 15.1).

A few centuries down the line from the Hippolytus vase, the construction of similarly arresting visual *tableaux* seems to have been canonised in the aesthetics of extreme spectacularity embedded in the pantomime mode. By Horace's time suicide, child-killing and child-eating, becoming animal or rock or tree (with their attendant somatic transformations) are the expected fare, a *fabula*'s climactic point, haunting or disgusting to the extent that the performer's body (as opposed to the poet's verse) is

wonder that from the fourth century BCE onwards messenger speeches became the roles the greatest acting stars were after; see Plut. *Mor.* 816f and *Lys.* 23.4, with Green (1999) 53. As Hunter (2004) 443 writes, in Hellenistic tragedy 'it is not unreasonable to suppose that messenger-speeches were in fact viewed as particular *loci* for clarity and *enargeia* within drama'.

suffused with the prized pictorial qualities of clarity (*saphēneia*) and vividness (*enargeia*).¹¹¹ By the beginning of the first century CE the very thing that Horace had shunned and relegated beyond the pale of acceptability with respect to tragic decorum Ovid wholeheartedly embraced.¹¹² Very much like Dickens, who took enthusiastically as his narrative model ‘the custom of the stage’ obtaining ‘in all good murderous melodramas’,¹¹³ Ovid co-opted the exuberant physicality of pantomime’s live bodies in his *Metamorphoses*, creating a profound symbiosis between dance and literary expression, gestural poetry and the poetry of words.¹¹⁴ It is here in the *Metamorphoses* that ‘[t]he prohibition to represent *coram populo* – that is, on stage – the transformation of Cadmus into a serpent (*AP* 187) is violated with gusto’.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ For *saphēneia* and *enargeia* in pantomime see Lucian, *Salt.* 36, 62, 63, 64; cf.

Aristaenetus, *Ep.* 1.26.

¹¹² While Horace purports to hate, Ovid is in love with his ‘incredible’ – shall we call them ‘pantomimic’? – fictions: *Tr.* 2.64 makes shorthand reference to the *Metamorphoses* as the work of ‘bodies transformed in incredible ways’ (*in non credendos corpora uersa modos*) (I owe the reference and thought to one of this journal’s referees). A spectator’s ‘belief’ in performed fictions seems to belong to the approbative vocabulary of ancient performance criticism: see, most importantly, Mart. *Spect.* 26 and the repeated emphasis on the credibility/verisimilitude of an aquatic performance (*credidimus remum credidimusque ratem*, ‘we believed in the oar and we believed in the ship’, 26.4).

¹¹³ See the famous opening of chapter 17 of *Oliver Twist*.

¹¹⁴ As Amy Richlin (1992) 175 put it, ‘perhaps this transformative poem derives its poetry from motion, the motion of the dance’. For animal metamorphoses in particular as informed by the pantomime mode see Lada-Richards (2018).

¹¹⁵ Barchiesi (1997) 250.

Yet even the *Metamorphoses*, wherein the fully fledged visuality of pantomime's gestural narratives is palpable, falls short of the last literary mutation of classical Athenian tragedy's 'hidden', offstage space, namely its outright, unashamed, triumphant flipping-into-prominence that takes place in the highly sophisticated pages of the Elder Philostratus' *Imagines*. As Elsner has shown, in a thematic group of 'tragic' *ecphraseis* which lead the reader back, self-consciously, to masterpieces of the Athenian tragic stage, Philostratus'

specific, and of course ironic, strategy is the persistent choice to make a picture from the tragic climax of a play that happens – in the dynamics of Greek tragedy – not to be performed on stage but recited to the audience *via* a messenger speech. Philostratean ecphrasis thus genuflects (especially) to Euripidean ecphrasis (in so far as Euripides' messenger speeches bring to mind descriptively events, including objects, not seen directly on stage), while simultaneously surpassing Euripides' failure to enact the deaths of Pentheus, Hippolytus, or the children of Heracles by offering a painting that fills the absence.¹¹⁶

Where tragedy (with Horace's retrospective approbation) 'fails' to generate physical vision, pantomime, Ovid and Philostratus triumphantly 'succeed'. More specifically in the case of Cadmus' metamorphosis, whose live unfolding on the stage the *Ars poetica* deplores, Philostratus' *ecphrasis* readily 'fulfils in painted actuality what Euripides could only report as dramatic speech rather than show as performative action'.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Elsner (2007) 311–12.

¹¹⁷ Elsner (2007) 315.

Harmonia and Cadmus are here ... they are already in the process of becoming (ῥῆδη ... γίνονται) snakes from the thighs up, and scales are already (ῥῆδη) upon them. Gone are their feet, gone their hips, and the change of form is creeping upwards. (*Imag.* 1.18.4).

It is far from my intention to inquire whether Philostratus' ecphrastic narratives are pantomime-inflected (though I would be greatly surprised if they were not). No less than my flash back to the fourth century BCE, my recourse to Philostratus hopes to place Horace's and pantomime's diametrically opposed aesthetic preferences within the long cross-cultural struggle between the visible and the discursive.¹¹⁸ As Mitchell (1986), 43 has taught us,

The dialectic of word and image seems to be a constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself. What varies is the precise nature of the weave, the relation of warp and woof. The history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a 'nature' to which only it has access.

A veritable gulf separates the 'indirect' or 'virtual' seeing¹¹⁹ offered to the spectator of classical Athenian tragedy and idolised in Aristotelian/Peripatetic aesthetics from the 'physical' seeing of post-classical expressive idioms. Unless we acknowledge the

¹¹⁸ While puzzling Horace's famous *ut pictura poesis* simile, Hardie (1993) also reaches the conclusion that 'there is in Horace ... a profound concern with the difference between the visual and the verbal' (124), Horace himself being 'one of the least pictorial of Latin poets' (120).

¹¹⁹ I borrow the terms from Meisel (2007) 49.

seismic order of the ‘turn’,¹²⁰ we run the risk of underestimating how large it may have loomed in Horace’s thought.¹²¹ If, on the other hand, we are minded to look harder for the shadowy imprint of the subliterate on our elite texts, we may be able to obtain a much richer spectrum of possible yet otherwise unsuspected readings as a result. The effort is, this paper has argued, entirely worthwhile, especially if it contributes to, as Peter Wiseman has put it¹²², ‘discourag[ing] dogmatism about what could or could not be shown on a Roman stage’.¹²³

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¹²⁰ A note of caution is in order at this point. Following Mitchell, I understand ‘turn’ (in this case a ‘pictorial or visual’ turn), as ‘a repeated narrative figure’ that can be applied to several nodal points in a culture’s history, as opposed to a tool for constructing binary models of discursivity and visuality; see Mitchell (2002) 173. After all, Greek tragedy itself is the product of the most impressive ‘visual’ turn of all.

¹²¹ The same holds true for pantomime’s contribution to the vivid scripting of the *Metamorphoses*. In a nutshell, see Hardie (2000) 429: ‘The links between the *Metamorphoses* and stage performances and dramatic texts are part of a wider tendency to evoke the spectacular and the visual, that makes of the poem an important stage in the development of what in first century CE literature becomes a dominant aesthetic of theatricality and spectacularity.’

¹²² Wiseman (1988) 9.

¹²³ Heartfelt thanks to Alessandro Barchiesi, who provided the most generous encouragement at a crucial juncture.

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